

A Study on the Influence of Brand Name on Purchase of Automobile in Malaysia

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper investigates the impact of brand name on purchase of automobile in Malaysia.

Design/methodology/approach: A theoretical framework is used to analyse the hypothesis: “A brand name has a significant influence on consumers’ decision making in purchasing a car”. A survey questionnaire was designed to explore the relations between branding and consumers’ decision making process.

Findings: The study revealed that branding has a strong influence on consumers’ buying decision. The respondents indicated their preference for known/branded car. It can be concluded that branding possesses much influence in affecting consumers’ purchasing decision.

Originality/value: Much have been written about the value of brands. This paper collects responses to ascertain the importance of brand names with particular reference to the automobile industry in Malaysia.

Keywords: Branding, cars, Malaysia

Introduction

The culture of capitalism that is revolving in today’s society is centred on the notion of ‘*you are known by what you have and not by what you are*’. This human value automatically leads the desire of individuals to possess things that distinguish them apart from the rest. In this regard, brand names play a crucial role that not only represent a particular company’s symbol or product, but defines the general lifestyle of a person. A particular brand can reflect consumer status in society, lifestyle and economic background, and influence consumer behaviour. To what extent this is true in the automobile industry in a developing country is the focus of this study.

In the past, the automotive production industry was dominated by a few European companies (Nag, Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2007). Over time, the car production industry enjoys massive growth as car ownership becomes a need thereby raising the demand for car (Lee and Govindan, 2014). As huge amount of capital and ideas were invested by the companies to create the awareness of the consumers in their brands, questions such as ‘*Does brand name influences the purchasing decision of the consumers?*’ are relevant. Notably, branding has emerged as a top management priority in the last decade due to the growing realization that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that firms have (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

The American Marketing Association (cf. Kotler, 2005, p. 404) defines a brand “as a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a mixture of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition”. Brand

is a combination of attributes that considered as an implied device by businesses to attract the consumers and achieve competitive advantage (Malik et al., 2013, Ghodeswar, 2008; Walley et al., 2007). The word brand originated from the Old Norse word '*brandr*' which means '*to burn*'. Successful brands have the effect of creating wealth by attracting and retaining customers. Usually a brand differs from another brand with the degree of power and credibility they have in the marketplace with some brands possessing a higher degree of awareness as compared to others. The outcome of this higher degree of awareness is consumer loyalty. Brand loyalty leads to positive and deep connection between the consumer and a brand. To Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), loyalty and trust are key success factors to a company to remain competitive in the marketplace. A product can be quickly outdated, but a successful brand is timeless (Nedeljković-Pravdić, 2010, p. 79). The uniqueness and popularity of a brand will strengthen the consumers' trust and loyalty towards the brand.

Traditionally, brand was used to distinguish two different products and as a mark of identification. According to Blijlevens, Creusen and Schoormans (2009), product differentiation through branding is desirable for both the consumers and producers. Brand names present an identification and information of a particular product to the potential buyers on what the product means while making it convenient for the consumers to summarize their feelings, knowledge and experiences (Rubio et al., 2014). Wen et al (2014) argue that branding enables consumers to save time searching for information about a product they wish to purchase as they can immediately construct the product information using brand names.

Against this backdrop, it is the objective of this paper to provide a deeper insight into consumer decision process by focusing on the automobile industry in Malaysia. The research investigates the influence of brand names on consumer behaviour in determining the car of choice.

The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To identify the key factors in the consumers' decision when purchasing an automobile
2. To examine the impact of brand names on the consumers' purchase decision of automobile in Malaysia

The following section describes a theoretical framework that depicts the relationship between branding and consumer behaviour. The paper proceeds to use a survey questionnaire specially designed to explore the relations between brands and consumers' decision making process. The study revealed that brand names have a strong influence on consumers' buying decision. Respondents to the survey questions indicated their preference for well-known branded car rather than trying new or unknown branded cars. It can be concluded that branded cars possess much influence in affecting consumers' purchasing decision.

Literature Review

There is an extensive literature on the role of brand names in determining the success of an organization. To review the literature it may be useful to consider a simple framework. Figure 1 presents a framework that depicts the relationship between branding and consumer decision making. The framework establishes the fact that consumers purchasing decision is a complex matter, and it is affected by the brand equity, emotional sentiments and buying behaviour of consumers.

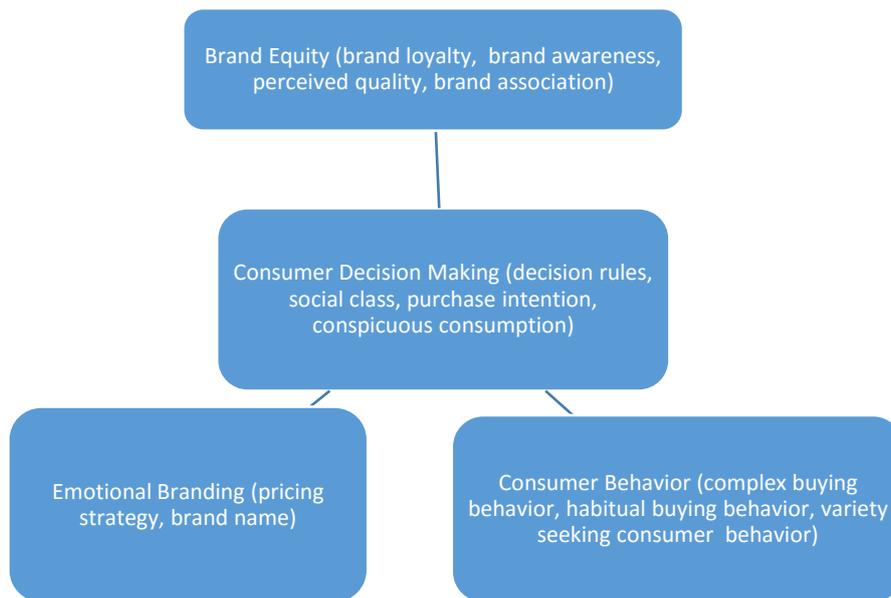


Figure 1: A simple framework

Brand Equity

There are different prevailing views about brand equity. David W. Cravens (2009, p. 276) has defined brand equity “as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers”. Wang, Wei and Yu (2008) consider brand equity as information that is obtainable from marketing activities of a product. Brand equity is a valuable asset for a company to achieve competitive advantage (Kotler et al., 2005, p. 556). A powerful brand enjoys a high level of brand awareness and loyalty which contributes to the strength and financial value of a company (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 5; Leone et al., 2006, p. 126). Brand equity is a function of four elements – brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association.

Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is associated with consumers preferences especially the belief of and faith placed on a particular brand. If the consumers are satisfied with a brand, they will regularly purchase the product (Leahy, 2008, p. 9). Consumers would benefit from reduced risks and time spent in making decision (Yeboah et al., 2013). Ultimately, as Kapferer (2008, p. 237) has pointed out, brand loyalty benefits a company through higher sales and lower promotional expenses thereby allowing the company to stay competitive.

Brand Awareness

According to Aaker (1996) brand awareness refers to the consumer’s ability to recall or recognize that a brand is a member of a certain product category so they can establish a link between product class and brand involved (cf. Malik et al., 2013). Brand awareness creates a high level of comfort to consumers in making decisions (Woodside et al., 2008; Moisescu, 2009). In the context of the car market, consumers may be more likely to consider and choose well-known branded cars rather than unknown branded if there is greater awareness of the brand and reputation of the company.

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is an essential characteristic of brand as it defines the consumer's perception on the quality level of a product. Chi, Yeh and Yang (2009, p. 137) explained that the consumers would have a low level of preference for a brand if they could associate brand with low level of quality. Most consumers prefer to purchase a well-known brand that has a proven record rather than trying an unknown or new brand (Desai et al., 2008, p. 96). Brand quality has a direct influence on the consumer's decision making process and brand loyalty. As the quality of a brand meets the level of consumers' expectations for that brand, it is more likely for the consumers to purchase a product with that brand name, and potentially leading to brand loyalty among the consumers.

Brand Association

Brand association consists of dimensions including favourability, strength and uniqueness which are helpful in distinguishing the various brands. Brand knowledge plays an important role in determining the differential response that creates brand equity. The dimensions make one brand more visible than other brands, based on the consumers' association with the brand that provides, for example, confidence and credibility. It would not be easy, for instance, for a company to compete with other companies which have established brand names that are associated with the provision of good services. This brand association provides a basis for purchase decision and brand loyalty where consumers will prefer and use a brand name that has been established as one that offers excellent services to the consumers.

Emotional Branding

Marc Gobé's (2010) philosophical view is based on the observation that connects the emotional relationship between brands and consumers. Successful companies build relationships with consumers by creating strong emotional bonds with their brands. The emotional bonds can be influenced by pricing strategy and the brand name itself.

Pricing Strategy

Apart from generating profit, successful pricing strategy creates brand awareness. Consumers generally assign the status of the brand according to the price level (Beneke, 2010, p. 208). Doostar, Akhlagh, and Abadi (2012) alluded to the fact that successful pricing strategy is able to establish a brand especially when consumers are less able to associate themselves with other brands using non-price factors due to time and cognitive constraints.

Brand Name

According to Khasawneh and Hasouneh (2010) and Keller (2008), brand name is a fundamental element of a company's success as consumers associate a product by its brand name. The significant choice of brand name captures the central theme or key association of a product and it should be unique, attractive as well as catchy to the consumers (Mishra & Dutt, 2014, p.873). Malik, Ghafoor, Iqbal, and Ali (2013) study on the automobile industry had argued that consumers have a strong connection to brand names, which have a great influence on consumers' decision. It is the association of the brand name with the brand's reputation in the market that derives the trust on that particular brand (Marjit et al., 2007, p.637).

Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behavior study revolves on the attributes on how individuals or a group of consumers choose, purchase and use or dispose the products or experience to satisfy their needs and desires (Durmaz & Diyarbakirlioglu, 2011). The consumer behaviour process involves the influences

of the surrounding environmental factors (e.g. comments, advertising, packaging, price and etc.) on consumer's feelings, considerations and acts. The physical action of a consumer that is related to the behaviour can be measured, for example, by assessing the frequency of consumers visiting stores or shopping malls.

Complex Buying Behaviour

Complex buying behaviour is defined as high involvement of consumers in the process of decision making. The consumers will invest time and resources to gather product information and learn more about the product prior to making the final decision (Kotler, 2005, pp. 276-277). For example, when a consumer decides to acquire a car, he/she will search the information on all available brands and compares and contrast the information before the final decision is made. However, this type of buying behaviour has its own vulnerability in the sense that the consumers may be overloaded with information that leads to the inability of the buyers to make a decision quickly (Ridgway et al, 2008).

Habitual Buying Behaviour

This type of buying behaviour differs from the complex buying behaviour where the consumer does not search extensively on the product's brand information. The consumers may develop brand loyalty relatively quickly in this regard. A consumer who has purchased a car of Brand A before may decide to buy a car of the same brand without much consideration being put in place on other car brands.

Variety-Seeking Buying Behaviour

Variety-seeking buying behaviour is associated with low level of consumer involvement and perceived differences among the brands. Consumers with this type of buying behaviour will very often switch from one brand to another.

Taken together, consumer purchasing decision is affected by a variety of brand associated factors. It is not the intention of this paper to explore each of the factors in relation to its impact on automobile consumption in Malaysia. However, it is important for any study that attempts to relate brand names with buying decision to be aware of such a myriad of factors that have been highlighted in the framework.

Research Setting

This section describes the research setting and methodology adopted in this study. A brief note on Malaysia and its automobile industry may be useful at this juncture.

Malaysia is a Southeast Asian country that consists of thirteen states and three federal territories. It has a total landmass of 329,847 square kilometres. The capital city of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country with a total population of 30 million people (Malays, 50.1%; Chinese 22.6%; Indigenous, 11.8% and Indians, 6.7%). The government system is modelled by the Westminster Parliamentary System. Malaysia was a formal British colony before it gained independence in 1957.

The Prime Minister is the Head of both the cabinet and government and the Yang di-Pertuan Agong is an elected monarch serves as the head of the State (the incumbent, Najib Razak, was appointed as the Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister of Malaysia in 2009). The government is elected through the general election system. Since gaining independence, Malaysia has been governed by a multi-party coalition (Barisan Nasional). Race plays a significant role in politics as evidenced in the enactments the New Economic Policy and National Development Policy, which were essentially aimed at protecting the rights of Bumiputera (Malays and the indigenous tribes who are considered the original inhabitants of Malaysia). These policies have provided

preferential treatment and privileges to the Bumiputera in terms of education, employment, sponsorships/scholarships, entrepreneurship and access to a low housing and automobile financing (Verkuyten & Khan, 2012).

The Malaysian economy grew at an average of 6.5% per annum over the last five decades. Malaysia's GDP stood at USD\$ 746 billion in 2014. Traditionally, agriculture was the main sector in Malaysia. Malaysia has transformed from an agriculture-based country since the 1980s to include more prominent sectors such as science, tourism, commerce and medical (Doraisami, 2012). Malaysia launched the Economic Transformational Programme on September 21, 2010, introducing initiatives and plans to transform the country into a high income economy by the year 2020.

In the 1980s, the Malaysian automobile industry Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional (PROTON) began to function when the former Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad ordered the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority to study the feasibility of Malaysia producing its own car. Proton Saga was the first Malaysian car to be produced by Proton with the assistance of Japan automaker, Mitsubishi. Since then, Proton has produced several indigenously designed cars.

The Malaysian automotive market is divided into two sole national manufacturers (Proton & Perodua) and imported brands from countries like Japan, Europe and the United States of America. The national company dominated 65% of the car industry share in Malaysia whilst the balance of 35% was held by the imported car brands such as Toyota, Nissan and Honda. The development of the local car manufacturing industry has supported the establishment and growth of supportive industries such as car accessories industries, car repairs sector and others. Presently, Malaysia is one of the region's largest auto markets, holding a dominant position in vehicle sales among the ASEAN countries (Mahidin & Kanageswary, 2004).

The National Automotive Policy (NAP) was introduced in 2006 to transform the domestic automobile industry landscape to enhance the local companies' level of competitiveness in the regional and global levels. The NAP was reviewed in 2009 to further enhance the domestic automotive industry in terms of capability. This policy was again reviewed in 2014 with the mission to transform Malaysia's automotive industry as an important component of the country's economy in terms of national output and employment creation (Ministry of International Trade and Industry, 2014).

Research Methodology and Research Sample

A survey questionnaire was designed to collect primary data intended for this study. The data were collected over a 6-month period in 2014-2015, and sample data comprising 120 respondents from a residential suburb located in Skudai in Johor Bahru, Malaysia was obtained. Johor Bahru (JB hereafter) is the third largest metropolitan area in Malaysia after Klang Valley and Greater Penang, with a total population of close to two million people. Connected to Woodlands Singapore through a bridge, a large numbers of JB residents have chosen to work in Singapore as the salaries of equivalent jobs are comparatively higher in Singapore (in PPP terms). Many Singaporeans are known to own property, businesses and infrastructure plants in JB (Ibrahim, 2007). Skudai is the largest city in JB. It is the new growth corridor of Southwest Johor comprising of Senai International Airport, Tanjung Pelepas Port and Bandar Nusajaya, which functions as a new administrative of Johor. Skudai has a population of 200,000 people. It serves as a large catchment area consisting of many shopping centres, schools, and tertiary education institutions. The sample respondents are car owners. The rationale of targeting those particular owners is aligned with the purpose of this research which is to determine the influence of brand name in the consumers' behaviour especially in the context of car purchasing decision.

Findings

This section presents the empirical findings gathered from the research. The results were analysed based on the key terms: brand equity, brand loyalty, brand awareness, pricing strategy, consumer behaviour, and purchase decision.

Table 1 profiles the demographic characteristics of the respondents. 70.8% of the respondents were males and 29.2% of the respondents were female. The age group of 25-35 years old accounted for 47.5% of the respondents followed by the 36-45 years old age group (20.8%), 46-55 years old age group (21.7%) and 56-65 years old age group (6.7%). The data collected shows that 11% of the respondents' had an annual income of between 3,000MYR – 5,000MYR, 32% of the respondents had an income level of between 5,001MYR – 10,000MYR and 36% of the respondents earned between 10,000MYR and 15,000MYR per month. 21% of the respondents have an income level exceeding 15,000MYR. On the respondents' occupation, 65% of the respondents work in the private sector whereas 22.5% work in the government sector and 12.5% are self-employed.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Measuring Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	85	70.8
	Female	35	29.2
Age (group)	25-35	57	47.5
	36-45	25	20.8
	46-55	26	21.7
	56-65	8	6.7
	>65	4	3.3
Income per month (RM)	3,000 - 5,001	13	11
	5,001 - 10,000	39	32
	10,001 - 15,000	43	36
	15,001 - 20,000	12	10
	>20,000	13	11
Occupation	Government sector	23	22.5
	Private sector	78	65
	Own business	15	12.5

The respondents were asked to identify the brand name of their car. In total, eight major brand names which included six global brands and two local brand names were identified. Figure 2 shows that 33 respondents out of 120 owns Toyota car followed by Honda – 21, Volkswagen – 18, Nissan – 13, Mitsubishi – 10, Perodua – 10, Proton – 8 and Mazda – 7. Comparatively speaking, foreign brands are more popular among the Skudai residents as compared to the local brands – Proton and Perodua.

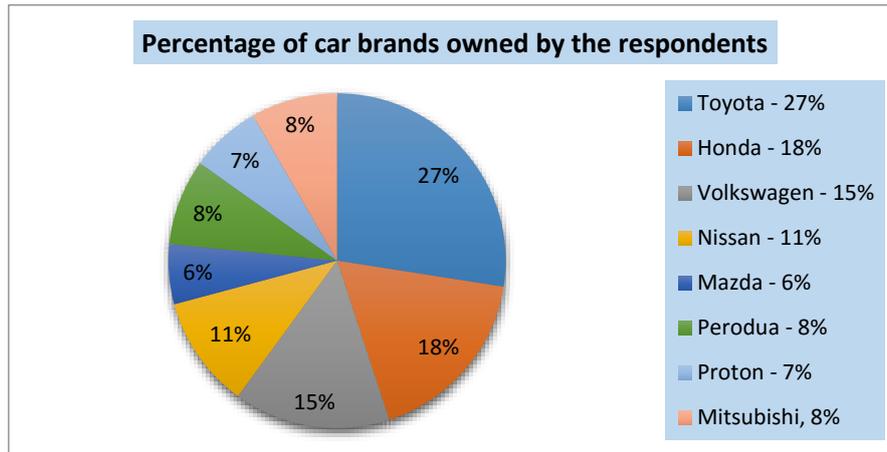


Figure 2: Percentage of Car Brands Owned by the Respondents

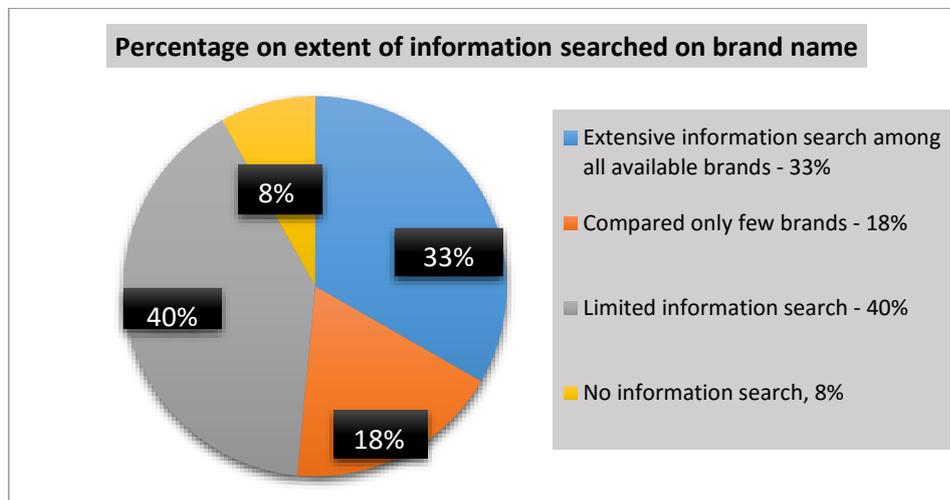


Figure 3: Percentage on Extent of Information Searched on Brand Name

The next question was aimed at determining the extent of information search that the respondents had considered before the decision to purchase a car with a particular brand was made. It can be seen from Figure 3 that 33% of the respondents conducted extensive information search of all available brands, 18% of them compared only a few brands and 48% did minimal or no search of information at all about the car brands.

The respondents were asked about what they would consider as important attributes of a car. The respondents were offered multiple attributes namely price, quality, brand name, past experience, and design, and they were allowed to select more than one option. Figure 4 shows that more than 95% of the respondents considered brand name as the most important attribute when purchasing a car. 92% respondents considered price as an important factor while 90% considered quality as the important attribute. 69% of the respondents said they considered the design of a car as one of the important attributes. It can be concluded that a brand name plays an influential role in the car purchase decision as it is considered as the attribute with most importance given by the consumers compared to other attributes.

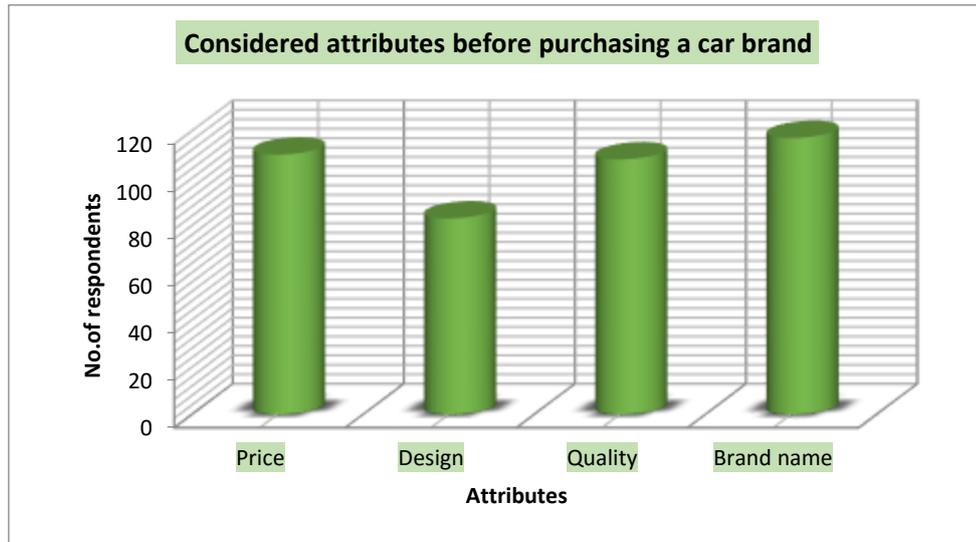


Figure 4: Considered Attributes before Purchasing a Car Brand

Next, we asked whether the respondents have purchased the same car brand. This question aims to find out whether there exists habitual buying behaviour and the extent of brand loyalty that the consumers might have on the chosen brand. Figure 5 shows that 59% of the respondents had opted to purchase the car of the same brand while 22% of them stated that they have both considered the same car brand as well as other brands while 19% of the respondents preferred to purchase a car that came with a different brand. The results show that consumers are more likely to purchase the car with the same brand name and form the chain of continuing purchase, suggesting that the purchase intentions might have been derived due to greater awareness of the preferred brand of car.

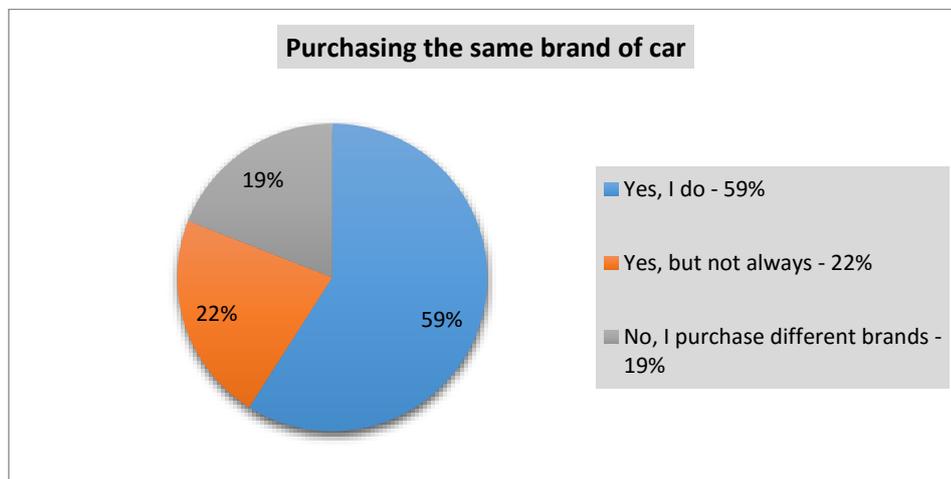


Figure 5: Purchasing the Same Brand of Car

On the question on whether the respondents have considered lesser-known car brands, a majority of the respondents (68%) noted that they had *never* considered any lesser-known brand cars (Figure 6). The level of trust and confidence they have in place for known and branded cars might have influenced their preference toward a particular car brand. Brand association where the brand knowledge of the well-known brands plays crucial role in determining the consumers' purchase decision as suggested by the results.

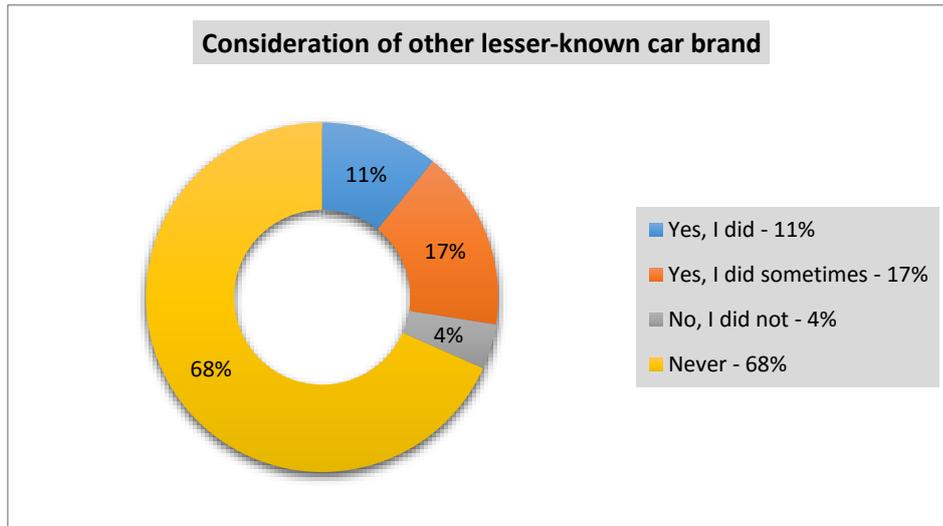


Figure 6: Consideration of other Lesser-Known Car Brand

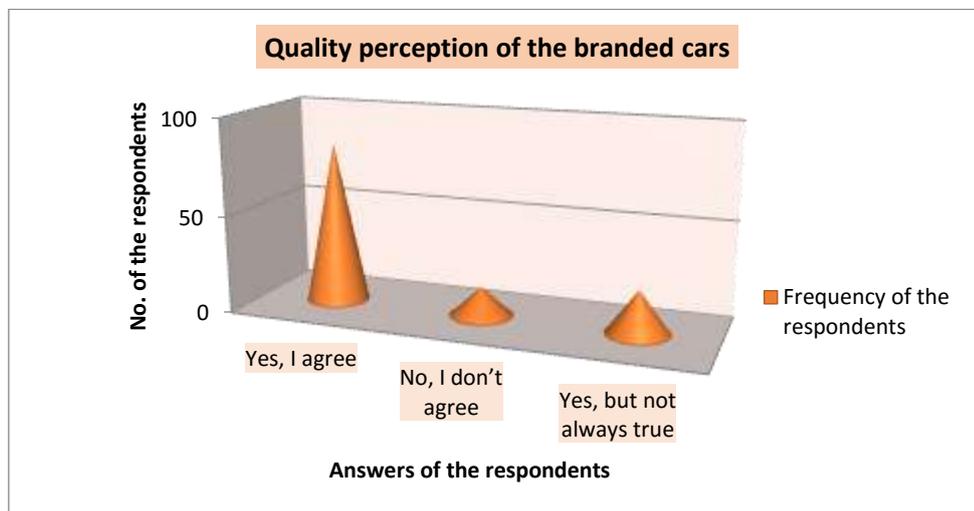


Figure 7: Quality Perception of the Branded Cars

To assess quality perception, the respondents were asked whether branded cars are associated with better quality. 69% of the respondents noted that branded cars tend to be of better quality compared to lesser-known brands (Figure 7). The results show that well-known branded cars are perceived to have superior quality over lesser-known branded cars.

To analyse the role of social class in the purchasing decision of a car brand, the respondents were asked whether they agreed on the statement that using branded cars would signify and define the social class of an individual. Figure 8 shows that 54% of the respondents said that driving branded cars would signify their social class whereas 20% disagreed. With a larger percentage of the respondents agreed to this statement, the results show the consumption choice of branded cars could be associated with the desire to enhance the person’s position in society, lifestyle and status.

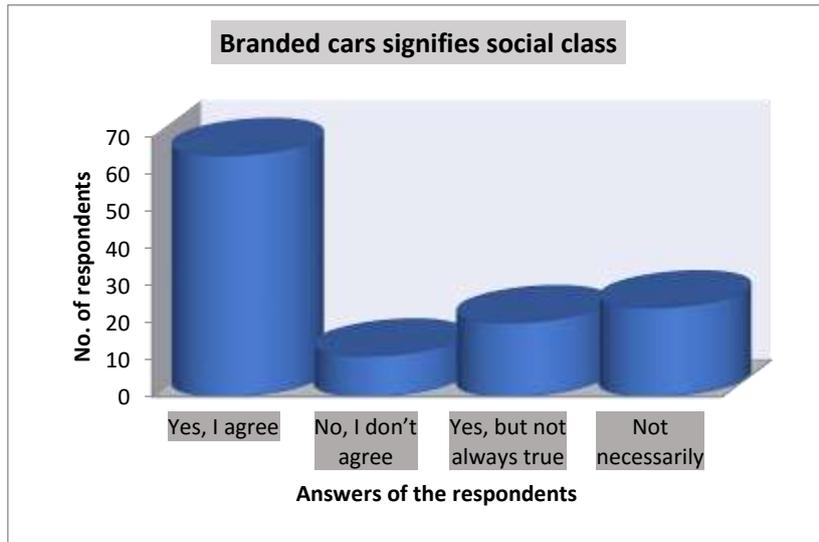


Figure 8: Branded Cars Signifies Social Class

Following up on the question on social class, a question on self-esteem was asked to analyse the relationship between the self-esteem, emotional branding and consumers' decision in purchasing branded cars. Figure 9 shows that 75% of the respondents (90 respondents) argued that using branded car would actually promote their self-esteem, and 11% responded that it would enhance their self-esteem but not always. 5% of them noted that driving branded cars would not enhance their self-esteem. As a larger proportion of the respondents explained that a branded car provides a positive feeling to the car users reflects the fact that the decision to purchase branded cars could have a positive effect in enhancing the users' image and self-esteem.

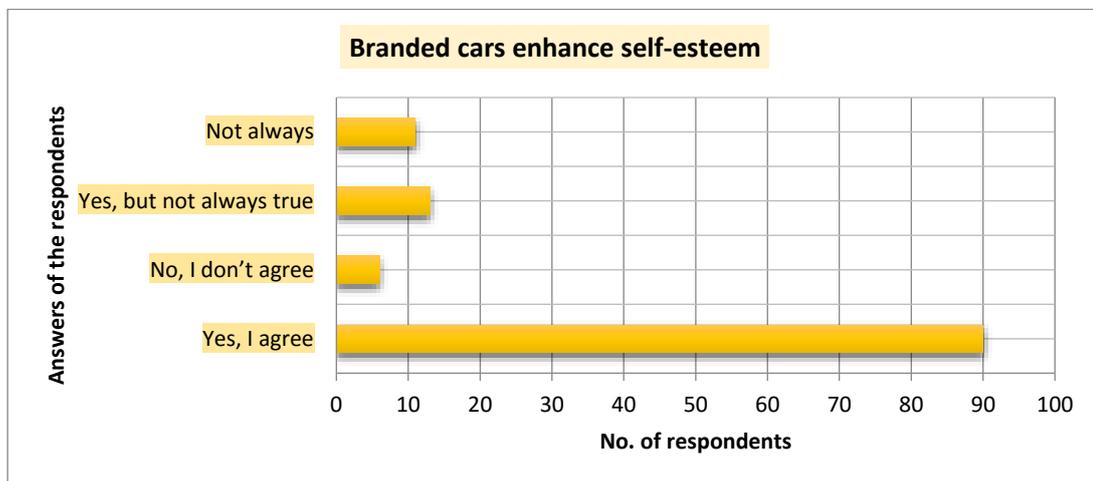


Figure 9: Branded Cars Enhance Self-esteem

A question on how important brand names would be to the car users alongside other attributes was asked. Figure 10 shows that brand names have an influential element among the car consumers in affecting purchasing decision of a car. 96% of the respondents agreed that brand names represent an important attribute of the car.

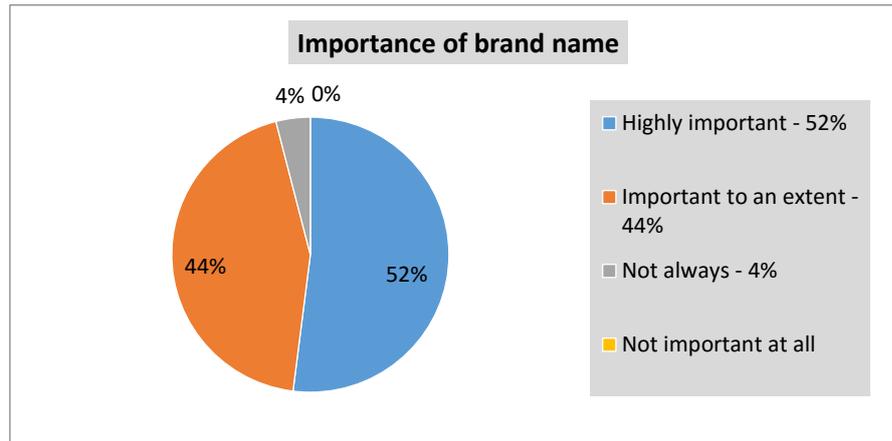


Figure 10: Importance of Brand Name

Concluding Remarks

This paper aims to determine the key factors considered by consumers in choosing a brand of car and assess the impact of a brand name on the consumers' decision. The results show that consumers have a strong preference toward branded cars, which are associated with better quality and superior performance. Branded cars are also deemed to have a positive effect on the users' status in the society.

The implications to business are straight forward. Clearly, brand knowledge, brand name awareness and brand association are key factors that companies should pay particular attention to as a means to increase their competitiveness. In the current technological era, consumers are able to obtain information on branded cars through different mediums such as the Internet, TV, newspaper and magazines on a regular basis to aid their decision making process. It is essential in this regard for car manufacturers to pay attention to social media and promote their brands via such channels.

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